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SUBJECT: STEINMEIER TO TRAVEL TO MIDEAST, PROMISES MORE ACTIVE GERMAN ROLE

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons 1. 4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Steinmeier kicks off a visit to Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories October 29. Steinmeier's trip is part of what the MFA bills as a more active stance toward the Middle East peace process, with the aim of supporting the USG efforts in the run-up to the Annapolis meeting, and with a view beyond. On October 15, Steinmeier publicized his proposed framework for an EU Action Plan for the Middle East in the German economic newspaper, "Handelsblatt." Explaining the timing of his new initiative, Steinmeier comments in the article that given the current Israeli-Palestinian talks, "there is a real chance" to reach a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Europe has an important role to undertake" in this regard, he continues.

He highlights two major goals for Europe: to create a supportive and encouraging environment for the Israeli-Palestinian talks, for which the U.S. plays a central role; and to help rebuild the Palestinian economy as well as its institutions and security apparatus. Regarding the former goal, Steinmeier stressed that, "The engagement of the American (Secretary of State) deserves recognition and support." Steinmeier underlined that the EU has "substantive, close and credible relationships with parties and countries in the Near East, that it can bring in closer coordination with the U.S. during this critical phase."

¶2. (C) Steinmeier will begin his Middle East trip on October 29, starting with meetings in Cairo with President Mubarak, Foreign Minister Gheit, and Arab League Secretary General Moussa, and continuing on for meetings in Israel with Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni and in Ramallah with Chairman Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad. According to MFA Deputy Head of the Near East Division Sibylle Sorg, Steinmeier's main goal in these meetings is to see how he can be helpful in promoting the current negotiations between Olmert and Abbas. Steinmeier also intends to present his plan to the parties and learn from the Palestinians what type of assistance they need to govern and to bolster security. Steinmeier will then travel to Istanbul where he plans to meet with the Secretary to discuss his trip.

¶3. (C) According to Sorg, Steinmeier's trip is to be followed by the November 7 State Visit to Germany by Saudi King Abdullah and then an Official Visit by Jordanian King Abdullah on November 14. According to Sorg, the main goal of these visits is for Germany to gain support from these two Arab leaders for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the Annapolis meeting.

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